

GILES SAMUEL BOOTH HEMPSTEAD, A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE ON A PIONEER PORTSMOUTH ARCHAEOLOGIST

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Reprinting of G.S.B. Hempstead's 1875 "Archaeological & Topographical Map of Portsmouth" (Converse 2005) and Hempstead's 1885 pamphlet and accompanying map (Bower 2005) focuses attention on one of Ohio's lesser known archaeologists and incidentally draws attention to the fact that there were actually two, slightly different, maps, the one reproduced by Converse apparently being the earlier.

Like many early Ohio archaeologists, Giles S. B. Hempstead (1794-1883) was a medical doctor with a great interest in archaeology and the natural sciences. He was born in New London, Connecticut, but the family moved to Marietta in 1802. In 1810, Hempstead studied law for a year in the office of Governor Return Jonathan Meigs, then attended Ohio University at Athens, receiving a B.A. in 1813, at which time he began the study of medicine. Licensed to practice in 1816, he first located at Waterford, then Athens, Guyandotte, West Virginia, and finally at Portsmouth. From 1858 until 1872, he resided at Hanging Rock, in Lawrence Co., before returning to Portsmouth.

Hempstead's observations on local archaeology originally appeared in the Portsmouth Tribune in the winter of 1875 and also appeared in a 19 page pamphlet, apparently with the map reproduced by Converse, although the copy available to me lacks the map. The pamphlet was aptly subtitled "With Some Speculations upon the Origin and Destiny of the Mound Builders," for the publication consisted largely of typical 19th century speculation. Hempstead envisioned a "rough stone age" contemporaneous with the mammoth, cave bear, "cave lion," hairy rhinoceros and the reindeer, followed by the polished stone era or "epoch of tamed animals" and a final metallic age.

Hempstead had viewed some of the earthworks as early as 1806 (presumably the Marietta earthworks, when he would have been twelve years old). The discovery of decayed logs in the embankments suggested to him that the parallel walls were originally built of timber and then filled with earth, to serve as a barrier against the large animals of that period, estimating original walls four feet thick and 20-30 feet high. He classified the earthworks as protective enclosures; sepulchral, sacrificial, and temple mounds; animal mounds; and hunting grounds for trapping large animals and securing them

for sport or food. Hempstead theorized that after learning to hammer copper in the Midwest, the prehistoric inhabitants migrated southward, being able to melt and mold copper by the time they reached Arkansas and Texas.

Although familiar with pipestone from the "Coteau des Praires," Hempstead does not mention the Ohio pipestone outcropping near Portsmouth and apparently thought all of the Mound City pipes were made of Minnesota catlinite. Familiarity with Cahokia led him astray in believing that Kinney's Hill, a large hill of circumalluviation at Portsmouth, was an artificial mound. The natural river terraces he also thought were in large part man-made. Hempstead concurred with Lucas Sullivant's idea that a line of signal mounds extended from Portsmouth up the Scioto as far as at least Pickaway County. The large amount of work required to build all of these earthworks was evidence of a slave caste necessary for their construction, and Hempstead thought that decipherable hieroglyphics might someday be discovered to give us "the whole history of this wonderful people." One of his more gratuitous errors was believing that the mound builders had domesticated the ground sloth and used it in clearing the forests prior to building their earthworks, and that many of the earthworks were used either to keep animals out of cultivated fields or as animal pens. The Kentucky "Old Fort" he considered to have been built not for defense but as an animal trap or as a pen for domesticated animals. He persisted in the belief that the mound-builders "were more educated, cultivated and farther advanced in civilization" than the later Indians and derives them from Atlantis, while "Tartars" crossed the Bering Strait and spread into Mexico and Central America shortly before the cataclysm that destroyed Atlantis and created a vast inland sea that covered the mid-continent and restricted the Indians to the eastern seaboard. Finally, the "Great Ice Age" forced the moundbuilders to migrate southward into Mexico and Central America.

Such speculation is largely absent from Hempstead's later paper, which is more descriptive, but each paper contains some information not found in the other, although his measurements do not always agree. The "Citadel," which contained Portsmouth's famous "horseshoe mounds" was described as 500 feet in diameter in 1875 and as 600 feet in diam-

eter in 1888; similarly, the larger two horseshoe mounds were described in 1875 as 105 feet across the heel and in 1888 as 150 feet across, while the smaller horseshoe formations were twelve feet across in 1875 and ten feet across in 1888. For example, in 1888, Hempstead describes the "Temple Mound," southeast and across the Ohio River from Portsmouth, as 20 feet high, at the center of a circle 150 in diameter, surrounded by three segmented earthen walls; by 1888, the mound had been reduced to six feet in height. The earlier paper gives the height of the Temple Mound as 45 feet high, the inner circle being 168 feet in diameter. It also provides the diameter of the outermost circular embankment as 640 feet and dimensions of the top of the Temple Mound as 50 by 75 feet, the longer axis oriented north-south. These measurements are not included in the later paper. Similarly, the curious hexagonal enclosure to the west of the Temple Mound is simply described in 1888 as "nearly destroyed by cultivation." But the 1875 paper states that the hexagon was 120 feet on its longer sides and 75 feet on the shorter. When first observed the embankments were four feet high and the ditch three feet deep but it had been nearly leveled by 1875.

There are only a few significant differences in the two maps. Notable differences are the presence in the later map of an additional mound in the "Hunting Ground" complex along the Ohio River southwest of Springville, Kentucky, and the square enclosure there being more rectangular in appearance. But the differences in actual measurements and descriptive detail between the two accounts, as well as sites mentioned in the one report and not in the other, require anyone interested in the archaeology of the Portsmouth area to be familiar with both publications.

Mention should also be made of an 1879 pamphlet by Hempstead titled *Archaeology. Development of the North American Continent*. Only a single copy of this pamphlet, in the Newberry Library of Chicago, has come to light, and it was discovered only within the last year. Like his first work, it is filled with much speculation, but Hempstead was hampered by a lack of understanding regarding the relative ages of the Paleozoic Mid-continental sea, the Pleistocene, and the Hopewell Culture. He gave credence to the legend of Atlantis. Following the penultimate



Figure 1. (Murphy) G.S.B. Hempstead from Nelson Evans' History of Scioto County, Ohio (1903)

glaciation he envisioned a huge mid-continental sea created by a catastrophic flood that destroyed most of the prehistoric inhabitants of the region; the remnants were an easy conquest for the Aztecs who then came down the western coast from the Bering Strait. As for the pioneers from Atlantis, they settled at the Ohio Hopewellian sites, their excursions for copper, mica, and obsidian expedited by their having the horse, as well as domesticated mammoths. Interestingly, their demise is ascribed to climatic change, advance of the last glacier, which drove them southward through Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas to Mexico. Somehow, all the requisite tectonics is connected with

electrochemistry, although mercifully Hempstead never goes into detail about this. His most valuable contribution to Ohio archaeology remains the maps accompanying his 1875 and 1883 papers.

Bower, Jerry
2005 Additional Information on the Archaeological Map of Portsmouth, Ohio. *Ohio Archaeologist* 55(3): 10, 2 fig.

Hempstead, Giles Samuel Booth
1875 *Antiquities of Portsmouth and Vicinity: With Some Speculations upon the Origin and Destiny of the Mound Builders*. Portsmouth, Ohio: McFarland & Elick.

Material originally published in the Portsmouth Tribune, winter, 1875. Hempstead surveyed and platted all works in the vicinity of Portsmouth as early as 1875.

1879 *Archaeology, Development of the North American Continent*. Portsmouth: Tribune and Republican Print.

1883 *The Mound Builders: A Particular and Minute Description of the Ancient Earth Works of Portsmouth, Ohio*. Portsmouth: Blade Publishing Co. 8 p. Reprinted in *Ohio Archaeologist* 55(3): 10-13 as *A Particular and Minute Description of the Ancient Earth Works of Portsmouth, Ohio*.